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ABSTRACT

Developed by the Southwest Iowa Learning Resources Center, Media Now is a course for secondary students in media studies. Curriculum concentration is on television, film, radio, and recorded sound. Individualization of instruction, behavioral science, and mediated learning packages are employed with each module interrelated through printed material. The goals of the original project were to develop an 18-week course of instruction for the grades 10 through 12, designed to increase knowledge, skills, and positive attitudes toward media. Instrumentation was designed and developed to measure the effects of (1) media exposure, (2) perceptions of media messages, (3) susceptibility of media influences, (4) behavior modification and media technologies, (5) functional categories of affective responses to media messages. The course covers experience in varied forms of media, and student performance was evaluated by locally devised measurements. After two years, this evaluation revealed that student usage of media had improved attitudes toward school and that students selected a greater diversity of program types. (DS)

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MASS MEDIA SHOULD BE CLASS MEDIA

By Ron Curtis

Someday soon the description of "illiteracy" will include "the inability to evaluate, interpret, appreciate and understand non-print media".

The culture that invented printing has known for more than 2,000 years "A poster is worth ten thousand tracts."

There is more "information" in a photograph than there is in printed words. Make a photograph move, and you add a dimension--mix moving images with appropriate sounds and you expand the information load a thousand times--add to all of that--color, careful editing, creative composition and thoughtful organization and communication possibilities are endless.

But the emphasis in schools still remains with the word media (print).

Most pedagogues reason that reading and writing are basic skills that are necessary for survival in our present society. Very few educators will deny that such skills must be taught, but few of these same educators recognize the necessity for an equal emphasis on reading and creating images. Words and images reinforce each other and neither should be ruled out in a well-rounded curriculum.

There is no incompatibility between those wanting to include "media" study in education and those championing "literacy", "basic skills" and accountability.

Responsible media educators have always been mindful of a need for teaching basic survival skills--they may have had different thoughts on what skills should be included.

> "The basic survival skills in any society are determined by the actual nature of that society itself and not by misconceptions or well-intentioned wishes about that society or culture."[1]

E. B. White predicted "television will be the test of the Modern World."

Morris Ernst observed that "no culture can be much better than its mass media."

One of the basic survival skills or our present society is mass media study. Study of the mass media includes the production and exploration of mass media forms such as film, radio, television, photography, and newspapers within the broad framework of general education.

Because the majority of our societal information comes from just a few of these sources (primarily from the electronic media) and because our culture is strongly affected both by what IS and IS NOT broadcast by those media, it is imperative that they be systematically studied in the public schools. Media study is a basic skill!

But it takes more than "turn them on" articles in educational journals to convince the educational establishment of the need to study the complexities of the mass media. It's even more difficult to establish a lasting rationale with educators as to the need for media production and the changes that will accompany such production in their respective schools.

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[1] A Kind of Writing, by Jon Dunn, Kit Laybourne and Andrew Steinmetz.

Even though the idea of studying the mass media is not new (W. W. Charters, a researcher at Ohio State University, held it in highest priority as early as 1935), it has not made the breakthrough expected by its proponents.

There have been numerous valiant efforts to push the movement forward.

At the Andover Conference on Media Education held at Andover, Massachusetts on November 3, 1969, the rationale of its clinicians evolved as follows:

> "Today's alarmingly pervasive alienation of the generations differs greatly from the past in that the communications media have become the messages supplying both the content of discontent and the instrument--the special frequency or wave band--of its dissemination."
>
> Obviously the instrument itself--multi-media--communications--offers the only means of approaching a cure to the endemic toxicity that is infecting the very life blood of our future... and that 'instrument' must be provided by education, and its use directed on the basis of the organism's self-knowledge and instinctual diagnosis of the therapy required.
>
> The conference also suggested a 'need to find ways of making the traditional school modes of instruction and training more relevant and acceptable to a new breed of student....We must abandon our concentration on divisive 'subjects' and 'courses' based on linear concepts largely inapplicable to an instant-impact, media dominated present and future, and turn to what has always been the true subject of education--the human being."

But for all their foresight and desire to inform educators of the "need", the most important and overlooked information from that meeting was outlined as follows:

> "The absence of organized public and 'political' recognition of the need for mass media study results in some hard uphill sledding. As a recent example, a sensitive, intelligently designed multi-media course for a single grade of 10-year-olds was finally adopted by a small minority of schools in 'almost 100 school districts' of the 27 thousand in the U.S.--or less than 0.4 percent--after five years of testing.

> The reason was that this was a typical case of isolated entrepreneurial inspiration and effort, with no main body of support to certify and promote it. There is a need for the development of a formal and formidable teacher-education program...for the scientific design of woefully needed curricula at each social, economic, ethnic and learning-capacity level of public education...and for a campaign program of 'Merchandising and Selling' to the public and (above all) the teaching profession."

There were a number of interesting supplementary recommendations. One includes: "The use of professional consultants in the arts, writing, and marketing communications with strong agreement on the need for top quality work at every level of promotion and publicity."[2]

Dr. Gerald O'Grady, Director of the Media Center at the State University of New York at Buffalo, writing on the preparation of teachers of media in 1969, said "we can recognize that media teaching and teachers will be at the center of innovation in planning curricula and, more likely, in completely reshaping our educational institution."[3]

The need for teaching about mass media in society was established on a less esoteric level by Professor James Crook, Journalism and Mass Communications Dept., at Iowa State University in Ames, in his dissertation for a doctorate at ISU, when he surveyed all 50 states in regard to that need. The following taken from Chapter 3 of his study relates to the question of the future needs of mass media education in the 50 states.

> "American public schools are beginning to offer units and courses about the mass media. In order to discover the extent to which this is a common practice, and the levels on which it is being introduced, a survey of the states was designed. The purpose was to distinguish

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[2] Incident at Andover, Report by Sydney S. Field on the Development Seminar of the North Reading Screen Education Project held at Andover, Mass., U.S. Office of Education Project #6-1535.

[3] Journal of Aesthetic Education, 3, 3 (1969), Gerald O'Grady, page 120.

between courses and units about the mass media in society being taught, and to chart the acceptance of the subject matter at elementary, junior high school and senior high school grades. An attempt was also made to obtain projections of the future adoption or rejection of mass media education in the states.

A three item questionnaire was mailed to members of the National Association of State Education Department Information Officers along with a cover letter asking them to forward the questionnaire to the appropriate curriculum supervisor in their organization. Mr. Richard Schallert, Director of Information and Publications, Iowa Department of Public Instruction, supplied the mailing list and allowed his name to be used in the cover letter. The questionnaire was prepared in consultation with Miss Sharon Slezak, Language Arts Consultant, Iowa Department of Public Instruction. The first mailing of questionnaires was on July 10, 1972. A response was requested by August 10, 1972.

Thirty-two states were represented with replies in the first month of the survey. On August 10, 1972, a second questionnaire and cover letter were sent to state department information officers in the remaining 18 states. A similar request was made of them and the letter indicated the number of responses received to that date. The questionnaire asked for response within a month."

"Five-Year Projection for Mass Media Education: In summary, the respondents were predicting that--

1. Programs of phase electives in language arts and social studies would increase and include courses in the mass media.

2. Mini-courses and short-term electives would increase and include courses in the mass media.

3. An increased emphasis on individualizing instruction would bring media study into school systems.

4. Visual literacy programs (Title III, ESEA) would provide a stimulus for adding media study.

5. An emphasis on career education would be a motivating factor in introducing media study.

6. Mass Media would be used to motivate students to new learning situations.

7. Educational television (ETV) and cable television would increase and provide new opportunities for media study.

8. Narrow media programs will broaden.

9. Interdisciplinary media study will increase.

10. Media studies will increase at junior and senior high levels with little increase at elementary school level."[4]

But in none of the literature was there a mention of the need for an organized course of study that includes a beginning compliment of the basic materials and resources for a broad approach to mass media study.

It was with this in mind that a project funded under ESEA Title III, Section 306 through the Iowa State Department of Public Instruction entitled "Media Now" was funded in 1970.

Media Now is an innovative curriculum, developed as a course for secondary students in the area of media study. It concerns itself primarily with the non-print mass media of television, film, radio, and recorded sound. The course is designed for a semester block of time, but can be used as a year-long course or its modules can be selected for units in already existing courses. Its makeup employs the technique of behavioral science, individualized instruction, and mediated learning activities packages. Each of the eight modules is interrelated with the others through a Student Learning Activity Guide (lab manual), a Student Learning Activity Book (supplementary readings and activities), and the packages that are specifically designed for the individual modules. Through a unique reference system of interrelating questions and a color coding process, the SLAB, SLAG and

[4] Dissertation for Doctor's Degree, by James Crook (Chapter 3).

packages are also inter-involved. This feature does not, however, affect the functioning of each component as an entity in itself.

The course was developed over a seven-year period by the Southwest Iowa Learning Resources Center, a regional media distribution center located in Red Oak, Iowa.

PROJECT GOALS

The goals of the original project were:

1. To design, develop, validate, produce, and disseminate an 18-week (75 hours, 5 sessions per week, 50 minutes per session) course of instruction for 10-12 grade students designed to increase knowledge and skills in, and to develop positive attitudes toward, media study; and to enable learners to be more discriminating in their media consumption practices. Specific knowledge and skills are defined in terms of behavioral objectives.
2. To design, develop, and validate instrumentation to measure the following primary effects of the Media Now program:
   a. Media exposure, evaluations, and utilization.
   b. Perceptions of the meaning of media messages.
   c. Susceptibility to influence through media.
   d. Learners' abilities to describe behavior modification techniques and media technologies employed by producers of messages to communicate to well defined audience classes.
   e. Functional categories of affective responses to media messages, as intended by the producer and

perceived by specific members of producer-defined audience classes.

The course had an added objective to narrow the gap between the need for qualified media teachers and the number available in the nation's schools.

Because it has been tested and validated in all types of classrooms, teachers with a minimum of instruction have been able to adopt the course with a greater likelihood of success in a new and technical curriculum area. The experienced creative media teacher finds the Media Now materials a welcome compilation of the best ideas from practicing media educators.

Although most teachers with a keen interest in the media can successfully teach Media Now, teachers with a background in journalism, media, film, drama, audio-visual education, or allied fields will have an advantage.

ACTIVITIES

The 50 learning activity packages enable the high school student to be actively involved. Each student is provided with the comprehensive Student Learning Activity Guide and Student Learning Activity Book and also has access to a Media Dictionary. The course includes activities which give the student experience in television, photography, the analysis of television commercials and full length feature films, recording techniques, and the production of all types of materials.

Media Now has been adopted by over 140 schools in Iowa and has reached over 5,000 students.

In addition to the Iowa schools, over 40 other schools throughout the country have adopted the course, affecting approximately 200 students.

Interest in the course has been significant. Articles have appeared in a number of professional publications. Approximately 7,500 requests for information and purchase have been received and processed by the Southwest Iowa Learning Resources Center.

Teacher training workshops have been held at the Center in Red Oak on five different occasions, with over 100 teachers being given training in the Media Now approach to media study.

EVALUATION

To measure student performance, the evaluation design includes the following standardized and locally devised instruments: Self Concept Attitude Scales, Attitude Toward Media Study, School Sentiment Scale, Attitude Toward Censorship, Attitude Toward the Aesthetic Value, the Meier Art Judgment Test, the Master Skills/Knowledge Measure, and Essay on Film.

Evaluation after the second year of the project revealed the following:

1. The student course has significantly improved the students' usage of media terminology and understanding of the effects of media.
2. Students who completed the course were more resistant to persuasion by media messages than were students in the control group.
3. Students in the course developed more positive attitudes toward school and toward the aesthetic value of newspapers, while they became more opposed to censorship.
4. Experimental and control students did not differ in self-concepts or their attitudes toward movies.
5. Students enrolled in the course chose a greater diversity of program types in their later media consumption and indicated that this consumption had become more self-selected.

Further research is now being conducted by the Southwest Iowa Learning Resources Center and results will be available in the spring of 1975.

The fifty learning activity packages and accompanying manuals can be purchased from the Southwest Iowa Learning Resources Center.

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